

BIG CYPRESS NP**Comments**

Park: Big Cypress NPRes

Project: Big Cypress National Preserve GMP Addition Lands (ID: 11164)

Document: Big Cypress National Preserve - Addition, Draft General Management Plan/Wilderness Study, Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement - May 2009 (ID: 27329)

AUG 12 2009**Received Date**

We welcome your comments on this project. The comment period closes on 09/30/2009. Your comments must be postmarked no later than 09/30/2009.

Please note: The preferred method for commenting is to use the electronic form located at:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>. Click on the link 'Plans/Documents Open for Comment', then select the document on which you wish to comment.

If you cannot use the electronic form, you may send this hard copy form and/or your letter to:

Before including your address, telephone number, electronic mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comments, you should be aware that your entire comment (including your personal identifying information) may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us to withhold your personal identifying information from public review by checking the box "keep my contact information private," we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

* indicates required fields

Comment Form	
City:*	Gainesville
Postal Code:*	32608
First Name:	Deborah
Last Name:	Stewart-Kent
Organization:	Florida Trail Association, Inc.
Member:	
Official Representative:	✓
Address 1:	5415 SW 13th Street
Address 2:	Gainesville, Florida 32608
Country:	United States of America
E-mail:	dstewart-kent@floridatrail.org
<input type="checkbox"/> Keep my contact information private	
Topic Questions Instructions:	
Topic Questions:	
Comments or Requests:	
Please see attached letter and Relevant laws, Policy and Guidelines for the Florida National Scenic Trail in Big Cypress National Preserve	
Thank you!	



Florida Trail Association, Inc.

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Florida's Footpath Forever

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August 5, 2009

Pedro Ramos, Superintendent
Big Cypress National Preserve
National Park Service
HCR 61, Box 110
Ochopee, FL 34141

RE: Comments concerning the Draft General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (Draft GMP/WS/ORV Plan/EIS) for the Addition Lands of Big Cypress National Preserve

Dear Superintendent Ramos,

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Florida Trail Association concerning the Draft General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (Draft GMP/WS/ORV Plan/EIS) for the Addition Lands of Big Cypress National Preserve. The Florida Trail Association has been a long-time partner of the National Park Service in the development and maintenance of the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) within Big Cypress National Preserve. The FNST in the Preserve offers hikers one of the best opportunities for solitude in the backcountry setting found anywhere along its entire length. Designation of the Addition lands as Wilderness would create the only designated Wilderness area along the FNST in South Florida and only the 4th designated Wilderness Area found anywhere along this 1,400 mile hiking trail (the three others are in the Ocala National Forest in central Florida and in Apalachicola National Forest and the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in the Florida panhandle).

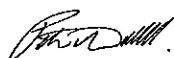
The Florida Trail Association strongly recommends that Alternative F be selected for the Addition lands general management plan. The Florida Trail Association supports designating the Addition lands for wilderness and primitive backcountry use as this alternative is the most consistent with the values for which Congress designed the Florida National Scenic Trail. Please refer to the accompanying document which lists the relevant laws, policy and guidance for managing and protecting the Florida National Scenic Trail in Big Cypress National Preserve. The adoption of alternative F would help ensure that Off Road Vehicles (ORVs) are excluded from using the FNST and ensures the preservation of the wilderness character and use of the area. The Association's greatest concern lies with allowing ORV use in the Addition lands which may limit our opportunities to permanently identify and protect a route of the FNST in this portion of the Preserve. The Florida Trail Association looks forward to working with the National Park Service in relocating the FNST from its current temporary route to a wilderness trail setting through the Addition lands. Selection of Alternative F is a once in a lifetime opportunity to give permanent wilderness protection to this land that is currently surrounded by 6 million people and still growing. Obviously, there will probably never be any other opportunities for designating a wilderness area anywhere else in South Florida.

If another alternative or combination of alternatives is selected, the Florida Trail Association strongly recommends that ORVs be prohibited from using the FNST except for designated crossings and that a buffer of at least one mile be established along the FNST to protect trail and the wilderness experience of hikers. The exclusion of ORVs from the trail and buffer is critical to maintaining the physical integrity of the trail, hikers' sense of solitude, and their opportunities to enjoy the natural beauty and to appreciate the wildlife of the National Preserve. As per the requirements of the National Trails System Act, to be eligible as part of the FNST, the trail cannot be open to motorized use. If ORV use is allowed on Nobles Road, Jones Grade or other ORV trails in the Addition lands, we strongly recommend that ORV usage be strictly regulated for speed, noise and time of day use and that these regulations be strictly enforced to accommodate hikers on the FNST and other non-motorized users of the Preserve.

The Florida Trail Association also supports enhancement of the I-75 mile marker 63 rest area to improve hiker safety and access and to facilitate better visitor education about the Preserve and FNST. We recommend that signage be placed to better mark the trail through the rest area and under the I-75 overpass. The USDA Forest Service will provide the official FNST markers for installation.

Thank you for considering our comments. If you have any questions, please contact Kent Wimmer, the Association's Florida National Scenic Trail Liaison at (850) 528-5276, or at kwimmer@fs.fed.us, or at 325 John Knox Road, F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303-4160. Thank you for your partnership in protecting the FNST.

Sincerely,



Peter S. Durnell
President



Deborah Stewart-Kent
Executive Director

enc. Relevant Laws, Policy and Guidance for the FNST in BCNP



Relevant Laws, Policy and Guidance for the Florida National Scenic Trail In Big Cypress National Preserve

Relevant Laws, Policy and Guidance:

National Trails System Act, 1968 (P.L. 901-543, 82 Stat. 919, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1241(note), 1241-1249)

Sec 3. (a)(2)

- National scenic trails, established as provided in section 5 of this Act, which will be extended trail so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails pass.

Sec. 7. (a)(1)(A)

- The Secretary charged with the overall administration of a trail pursuant to section 5(a) shall, in administering and managing the trail, consult with the heads of all other affected State and Federal agencies.

Sec. 7. (c)

- Other uses along the trail, which will not substantially interfere with the nature and purpose of the trail, may be permitted by the Secretary charged with the administration of the trail. Reasonable efforts shall be made to provide sufficient access opportunities to such trails and, to the extent practicable, efforts shall be made to avoid activities incompatible with the purpose for which such trails were established.

Sec. 7. (h)(2) (I)

- In order to maintain good conduct on and along the trails located within federally administered areas and to provide for the proper government and protection of such trails, the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture shall prescribe and publish such uniform regulations as they deem necessary and any person who violates such regulations shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and may be punished by a fine of not more than \$500, or by imprisonment not exceeding six months, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

Florida National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan (approved by Max Peterson, Chief of the USDA Forest Service on December 4, 1986)

Page 13, Purpose of the Florida National Scenic Trail, Objective:

- Be commensurate with its national significance in location, design, construction, and maintenance while reflecting the type and volume of traffic planned; and limited by the

standards established for special legislated areas (National Parks, National Forests, State Parks, National Wildlife Refuges) through which it passes.

Page 69, Types of Use Permitted, Use Determination

- On the Florida National Scenic Trail hiking shall be allowed throughout, other uses are optional with the land manager. Uses other than hiking should be permitted if the activity will not cause degradation of the treadway and surrounding environment, and the activity can be safely accommodated.

Page 70, Types of Use Permitted, Carrying Capacity

- The point at which the Trail reaches its capacity to carry people without diminishing their experience or causing deterioration to the resource depends on several factors:
 1. Expectations of the user
 2. Topography
 3. Stability of the tread surface
 4. Vegetative cover
- The Visual Management System (V.M.S.), Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (R.O.S.) and Limits of Acceptable Change (L.A.C.) will be used for guidelines for design, development and monitoring the trail.

Page 144, Appendix L, Forest Service Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, Table 1

- Activity Characterization, Land Based Activities (Primitive) lists: "Viewing Scenery, Hiking and Walking, Horseback riding, Camping, Hunting, Nature Study, Mountain Climbing, General Information."
- Setting Characterization (Primitive) on page 145 states: "Area is characterized by essentially unmodified natural environment, or fairly large size. Interaction between users is very low and evidence of other users is minimal. The area is managed to be essentially free from evidence of human-induced restrictions and controls. Motorized use within the area is not permitted."
- Experience Characterization (Primitive) on page 146 states: "Extremely high probability of experiencing isolation from the sights and sounds of humans, independence, closeness to nature, tranquility, and self-reliance through the application of woodsman and outdoor skills in an environment that offers a high degree of challenge and risk."
- Evidence of Humans Criteria (Primitive) on page 147 states: "Setting is essentially an unmodified natural environment. Evidence of humans would be unnoticed by an observer wandering through the area. Evidence of trails is acceptable, but should not exceed standard to carry expected use. Structures are extremely rare."
- Social Setting Criteria (Primitive) on page 148 states: "Usually less than 6 parties per day encountered on trails and less than three parties visible at campsite."
- Managerial Setting Criteria (Primitive) on page 149 states: "On-site regimentation is low with controls primarily off-site."

Certification Agreement for the Florida National Scenic Trail (as affirmed by Karen Gustin, Superintendent, Big Cypress National Preserve; as certified by Susan Matthews, Forest Supervisor, National Forests in Florida; and concurred by Peter S. Durnell, President, Florida Trail Association) executed July 8, 2008.

V. Public Use and Access (page 7)

A. Legal Requirements Stated in the Act

The National Trails System Act established the basic requirements for public use and access to National Scenic Trails. These basic requirements must be met before a trail can be certified as a National Scenic Trail...

Section 7(c) of the Act describes permissible uses of the trail.

"...efforts shall be made to avoid activities incompatible with the purposes for which such trails were established. The use of motorized vehicles by the general public along any National Scenic Trail shall be prohibited..." and

"...The Secretary charged with the administration of such trail shall establish regulations which shall authorize the use of motorized vehicles when such vehicles are necessary to meet emergencies."

B. Permitted Uses and Special Conditions (page 8)

1. Only Foot travel will be allowed on these Big Cypress National Preserve segments with the exception of where the hiking trail joins up with the preexisting non-motorized, multiple-use segments.
5. Motorized use of these segments is permissible for administrative uses authorized by the Big Cypress National Preserve.

VI. Trail Management (page 8)

A. General Guidelines

4. The management objective for the Trail is to maximize the primitive, undisturbed experience.

C. Trail Routing (page 9)

3. The trail shall be routed away from developmental activities to avoid conflicts and safety of the hiker.
4. Man-made features such as roads shall be crossed at right angles to avoid prolonged visual contact.
7. Any roads used as part of the Florida National Scenic Trail will be closed to motor vehicle use, except for administrative purposes or bridge crossings.

VII. Protection Measures (page 13)

Protection measures for the FNST should consider not only the physical trail but also the adjacent area to ensure that the scenic and environmental goals of the Trail are preserved. The trail corridor, or protection zone, has been defined as the visible foreground area from the Trail. The size of the visible foreground will vary depending on the topography of the area and the density of vegetation. In general, the objective is to minimize negative visual impacts and to improve the scenic characteristics within the trail viewshed. The Trail experience should be further enhanced by prevention or mitigation of sound impacts.

5. Road Construction, Reconstruction, and Maintenance (page 14)
 - a. New road construction should not displace the FNST if possible.
 - b. Analyze all new road construction and reconstruction that will cross or parallel the FNST corridor or middle-ground of the FNST viewshed for potential undesirable impacts on the FNST user.
 - c. Coordinate all road construction, reconstruction, and maintenance activities that could affect the FNST corridor with the Florida Trail Association and the USDA Forest Service.